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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4293
INFO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS IMMEDIATE
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL IMMEDIATE 2445
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PROG

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANILA 005016

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KN](#) [JP](#) [RP](#)
SUBJECT: VISIT OF JAPANESE PRIME MINISTER ABE TO MANILA

REF: MANILA 4935

Classified By: Pol/C Scott Bellard, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary: Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe used his December 8-10 visit to highlight a growing emphasis on political and security issues, including North Korea, terrorism, Mindanao, and human rights. He also brought a basket of new assistance, but more explicitly linked future assistance to effective Philippine action on political killings. The new focus should help to ensure that this key bilateral relationship is more comprehensive and forward-looking. End Summary.

12. (U) Japanese Prime Minister Abe visited Manila December 8-10 for his first official trip to the Philippines in that capacity. Prime Minister Abe carried through with the visit to the Philippines despite the postponement of the ASEAN-related Summits, including the second East Asia summit, in Cebu December 10-13 (reftel). This year marked the Golden Anniversary of Japanese-Philippine diplomatic relations.

New phase: political and security cooperation

13. (C) According to Japanese Embassy Pol/C Taeko Takahashi, the substance of Prime Minister Abe's visit was designed to reflect a heftier emphasis in bilateral ties on political and security issues, after having focused primarily on economic and development ties for the first fifty years. These themes dominated the Japan-Philippine Joint Statement President Arroyo and PM Abe issued after their meeting at Malacanang Palace on December 9. Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs Northeast Asia Division Director Constancio Vingno called the statement a "roadmap to the next fifty years" of Japanese-Philippines relations. Among its most important points were:

- joint condemnation of North Korea's recent missile launches and its nuclear test, joined with a call for North Korea to abandon all nuclear weapons and existing nuclear programs, to resume the Six Party Talks, and to abide by UN Security Council resolutions 1695 and 1718;
- joint determination to "prevent, suppress and eliminate all forms of terrorism," with Japan providing assistance for capacity building of law enforcement agencies, including the Philippine National Police and the Philippine Coast Guard;
- cooperation in enhancing regional cooperation through the East Asia Summit, ASEAN Plus Three, and ASEAN Regional Forum;
- contributions to regional stability by achieving peace in Mindanao, with Japan helping to provide a "dividend of peace" through its new advisor to the International Monitoring Team, many assistance programs, and the drafting in 2007 of a new plan for reconstruction and development in Mindanao;

-- promotion of mutual understanding and cooperation on maritime and ocean affairs; and,
-- reiteration of the importance of "sustaining harmony, upholding democratic values and protecting human rights," as well as working to eradicate human trafficking while protecting its victims.

Aid Linked to Action on Killings

¶4. (C) Japanese Pol/C Takahashi and econoff Kunihiro Higashi separately described how the Japanese had strongly warned their Philippine counterparts that the Prime Minister would have to send a strong message on political killings in the Philippines, in part because of Japanese domestic political audiences and more generally in order to ensure broad Japanese public support for growing relations with the Philippines. The Japanese delegation welcomed the fact that President Arroyo, immediately after her opening remarks, directly raised the issue, and underscored that the Philippines -- and she personally -- "strongly condemned killings, legal and illegal" and that "the Philippines is a democracy that pursues peace and respects human rights." Prime Minister Abe told President Arroyo that he "appreciated the President's explanation of the Philippines' human rights situation," adding that "in order smoothly to carry out future Japanese overseas development assistance projects, please note the strong interest in human rights on the Japanese side." President Arroyo described briefly some of the new steps, including formation of a police task force and a new presidential commission, to investigate the killings, bring perpetrators to justice, and suggest more effective policies to prevent such acts. Higashi added that, at the

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ASEAN Ministers' meeting in Cebu on December 8, Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Aso told Philippine Foreign Secretary Alberto Romulo that "in order for us to release more economic aid, I want the Philippines to understand the strong concerns among some people about the human rights record of the Philippines." However, Philippine DFA Northeast Asia Division Director Vingno downplayed the importance of Japan's human rights message, claiming that it was "no different" than that raised earlier by European countries.

¶5. (U) Prime Minister Abe nonetheless used the visit to highlight various Japanese assistance programs, including a USD 73 million flood alleviation project for the National Capitol Region (Metro-Manila), the USD 624,000 Japan-Bangsamoro Initiatives for Reconstruction and Development, and the inauguration of Japanese-made "3rd Generation" light rail trains financed by Japan with concessionary loans. (Note: Japan ranks first in terms of total Official Development Assistance to the Philippines, while the U.S. ranks highest for grant assistance and is third in terms of total ODA. End note)

Other agreements

¶6. (U) The two leaders welcomed the signing of a Japan-Philippines Economic Partnership Agreement in September 2006. Local NGOs have already been active in criticizing the agreement for allegedly permitting Japan to export toxic waste, but Japanese officials clarified that only items permitted under Philippine regulations could enter the country, with no special exceptions for Japan. Philippine officials nonetheless predict a rough road ahead in securing Senate approval of the new agreement. During the visit, the two countries agreed to an amendment to an existing tax treaty addressing double taxation. Prime Minister Abe also indicated that, in addition to USD 250,000 in disaster relief for recent typhoons, Japan would contribute up to an additional USD 1 million for such assistance.

Comment

17. (C) Philippine officials were noticeably relieved that Prime Minister Abe went forward with his visit despite travel advisories from Australia and the UK (in addition to a US Embassy warden message) related to security threats during the Cebu summits and their subsequent postponement. President Arroyo at least was able to have one important international visitor in December 2006, even if the gala summits did not yet take place. The Philippines frequently highlights the "triad" of its most important partners -- China, Japan, and the U.S. -- and the new additional focus on political and security issues should help to ensure that this key bilateral relationship is more comprehensive and forward-looking. Abe's strong message on human rights and the apparent linking of ODA with Philippine efforts to stop political killings are welcome and indeed reflections of a maturing relationship.

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